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SOUTH KOREA

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Rhee's reiteration of a demand for an automatic military guarantee, which was previously rejected by the United States during the Rhee-Robertson talks, probably stems from his belated recognition that the stationing of US troops in Korea is likely to be prohibited under decisions made at the political conference. While this move is regarded primarily as a bargaining tactic on Rhee's part, he might consider a rejection

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of his demands sufficient grounds for ^{attempting to disrupt} ~~hindering~~ the armistice.

While there is no evidence that Rhee plans ^{such} ~~to disrupt the~~ ^{action} ~~truce~~ in the past few months he has strengthened his control over the South Korean internal situation in ways which increase his ability to oppose unfavorable decisions and to undertake independent action. These have included a policy of intimidating opposition parties and leaders to the extent that little ^{effective} ~~but controlled~~ opposition now exists. There are some indications that he may now move to cut the power of the National Assembly by seeking the constitutional changes he has long desired, including lifting the ban on a third term for himself and empowering the government to dissolve the legislature. He has also strengthened the intelligence and investigation bureaus of the National Police, assumed absolute control over the Provost Marshal General Command, established a militia which may in time neutralize the influence of the

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regular army, and largely removed Japanese-trained officers, who have generally proven anti-Rhee. By removing two cabinet officials and ordering the abolition of all youth organizations, Rhee struck at elements within his own party which were getting too strong.

Finally, he is said to be contemplating the establishment of a formalized joint chiefs of staff. This could be so constituted as to strengthen Rhee's control over the military and provide him with a command structure to replace the United Nations Command.

Rhee is already challenging the UN Command's authority over his navy by directing it to expel Japanese fishing vessels from the high seas adjacent to Korea in violation of General Clark's orders. This action could also be interpreted as a violation of the armistice which forbids the establishment of a blockade. Rhee, however, is unlikely to consider the dispute

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related to the armistice agreement, and he would probably take the position that he is not bound by any decision which impairs Korea's sovereign rights or its "national survival."

Japanese-South Korean tension over disputed fishing rights flared anew following the suspension of the UN Sea Defense Zone on 27 August ~~1963~~. A South Korean protest to the UN Command against the suspension and a public statement that the government would enforce the unilaterally imposed "Rhee line," which roughly corresponds to the Sea Defense Zone, was followed by Korean naval action against Japanese fishing operations within the line.

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While the issue is primarily a problem of Japan-Korea relations, the threat of both sides to resort to force in which American-supplied armament would be used confronts the United States with a potentially explosive situation.

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NSC Briefing 17 September 1953

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Peipings Stand on Political Conference

South Korea